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Miss. Baptists nominated for SBC posts

GREENSBORO, N.C. (BP) — Nominees to serve in Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) posts have been selected by the 2006 SBC Committee on Nominations. Nominees will serve if elected by the messengers to the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention on June 13-14 in Greensboro, N.C. The Mississippi Baptist nominees are:

SBC Executive Committee Nashville

Daryl E. Oster, pastor of Center Ridge Church, Yazoo City, replacing Clark Stewart, pastor of Harmony Church, Crystal Springs. Term expires 2010.

Mississippi Baptists currently serving are Clarence Cooper, pastor of Emmanuel Church, Grenada, and president of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, whose term expires in 2008; and Ida South, member of First Church, Mathiston, whose term expires in 2009.

GuideStone Financial Resources Dallas

No new nominees. Mississippi Baptists currently serving

are William T. (Dale) Patterson, member of First Church, Jackson, whose term expires in 2007; and Forrest D. Sheffield, pastor of Harrisburg Church, Tupelo, whose term expires in 2008.

International Mission Board Richmond

Anthony K. (Keith) Heartsill, member of First Church, Grenada, replacing Don M. Boone, who resigned the pastorate of First Church, Louisville, to enter full-time evangelism and moved to Mobile. Term expires 2010.

Mississippi Baptists currently serving are Charles E. Smith, Jr., vocational evangelist of Sturgis, whose term expires in 2007; and Wayne E. Marshall, pastor of Longview Heights Church, Olive Branch, whose term expires in 2008.

North American Mission Board Atlanta

Mark Worsham, senior pastor of Bogue Chitto Church, Bogue Chitto, replacing Joseph I. (Joe) Strahan of Vicksburg. Term expires 2010.

Nominated for second term is Reva S. Daniel, member of Morrison Heights Church, Clinton. Term expires 2010.

LifeWay Christian Resources Nashville

No new nominees. Nominated for second term is Mark H. Anderson, pastor of Colonial Heights Church, Ridgeland. Term expires 2010.

Also serving is Thomas Michael (Mike) Webb, a member of Harmony Church, Crystal Springs, whose term expires 2009.

Southern Seminary Louisville, Ky.

No new nominees. Nominated for second term is Glenn A. Miles, a member of Harmony Church, Crystal Springs. Term expires 2011.

Also serving is John A. Temple, pastor of First Church, Madison, whose term expires 2010.

Southwestern Seminary Ft. Worth

No new nominees. Currently serving is Edward A. Knox, pas-

tor of Antioch Church, Columbus, whose term expires 2008.

New Orleans Seminary New Orleans

Dwight D. (Dean) Stewart, pastor of 38th Avenue Church, Hattiesburg, replacing retired pastor Albert H. McMullen of Meridian. Term expires 2011.

Also serving is Mack Grubbs, a member of Temple Church, Hattiesburg, whose term expires in 2008; and William Phillip (Phil) Hanberry, a member of Temple Church, Hattiesburg, whose term expires in 2007.

Southeastern Seminary Wake Forest, N.C.

No new nominees. Currently serving is Richard W. Headrick, member of Salem Heights Church, Laurel, whose term expires 2006.

Midwestern Seminary Kansas City, Mo.

No new nominees. There are currently no Mississippi Baptists serving.

Golden Gate Seminary Mill Valley, Ca.

No new nominees. Currently serving is David W. Grumbach, pastor of Petal-Harvey Church, Petal, whose term expires 2008.

Ethics & Religious Liberty Comm. Nashville

Nominated for second term is James L. (Jim) Brown, a member of Trinity Church, Southaven. Term expires 2010.

Order of Business Committee

No new members. Currently serving is Joe R. Turner, pastor of First Church, Horn Lake, whose term expires 2008.

In addition, SBC President Bobby Welch announced the appointment of Eddie Kinchen, member of First Church, Jackson, to the Credentials Committee for the SBC annual meeting in Greensboro on June 13-14. No Mississippi Baptists were appointed to the Tellers Committee for the annual meeting.

Ministry Assistants Assoc. meets, elects officers



Officers of the Mississippi Baptist Ministry Assistants Association, which met April 3-4 at Camp Garaywa in Clinton, are (from left): Elizabeth Godfrey, Columbus, Area Four Representative; Julia Field, Amory, Treasurer; Robbie Linley, Louisville, Chaplain; Kay McDonnell, Madison, Baptist Building Representative; Betty Anne Bailey, Raymond, Chaplain; Linda Coleman, Yazoo City, First Vice President; Sharon Brewer, Brandon, President; Dimi Cunningham, Ocean Springs, Area Nine Representative; Sandi Komurke, Madison, Area Five Representative; Scheryl Ng, Ridgeland, Area Five Representative; Sandy Cammack, McComb, Area Seven Representative; Not pictured: Jerebeth Mehler, Southaven, Area One Representative; Patricia Ethridge, Greenwood, Area Three Representative. (Photo by Tony Martin)



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Mixing fact and fiction

The Da Vinci Code book and movie have captured the imagination of the American public as have few items of entertainment in recent years. People who have read the book say it's hard to put down, and moviegoers happily handed over more than \$77,000,000 in the U.S. (\$244,000,000 worldwide) during the movie's opening weekend.

The movie hasn't been an unmitigated success, however. Critics have been savage in describing The Da Vinci Code's technical quality (or lack thereof). "Looking for the Holy Grail of blockbuster movies?" wrote Linda Cook of the Quad City Times newspaper in Davenport, Iowa. "Keep looking. You won't find it in The Da Vinci Code, an overblown, bland, ghost of the best-seller by Dan Brown."

"The greatest threat that Dan Brown's book, and now Ron Howard's film of the same, poses to spirituality is the same threat that any bad art presents the human soul," opined Walter Chaw of Film Freak Central.

The Da Vinci Code wouldn't be the first film that the critics hated and the public loved, but the critics are on to something — and so is the public. The critics know it's just another low-brow, mass market offering, while the public knows that's exactly what they want. Like the groundlings at Shakespeare's Globe theater, we'll pay to see just about any production that's dumbed-down enough that even we can understand it.

The problem with acting like groundlings is that we never seek to learn



more about what is behind the entertaining scenes we consume so voraciously. They simply suspended reality, and we do too.

One of the big dangers of mass market books, television, and movies of The Da Vinci Code sort is that the writers seek to indoctrinate us while we are in that state of suspended reality, to the extent that many of us leave with an altered sense of the truths we have known and accepted all our lives.

The movie JFK was like that. Director Oliver Stone didn't just tell the story of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in a way that caught moviegoers' fancy. He fabricated characters, events, and conversations to cement his conspiratorial theories and move the film along to its erroneous conclusion.

Stone, a masterful film maker, used all his skills in such a perverse way in JFK that many Americans are now convinced

Kennedy was indeed a victim of a murder conspiracy. Of course, all the evidence (not theory, but evidence) points completely in the other direction.

In much the same way, writer Dan Brown and director Ron Howard mix just enough historical fact with a whole lot of fiction to alter people's perceptions about what they have believed for a lifetime. Along the way, they utilize some very persuasive plot lines.

For example, there was indeed a Mary Magdalene among the followers of Jesus, but absolutely no evidence in the Bible that Jesus and Mary were spouses and parents as The Da Vinci Code alleges — a little fact, a lot of fiction. In the same vein, there exists a Catholic order called Opus Dei, but the organization does not employ albino monks to exterminate people on the verge of discovering the "truth" about Jesus and Mary. Again, a small amount of truth, a large collection of lies.

There are successful movies in this genre that have entertained us without trying to confuse our beliefs through such a powerful mix of reality and fantasy. The Indiana Jones trilogy comes to mind. Those movies dealt with such real-life situations as the Nazis and the search for the Holy Grail, but were not manipulative like JFK and The Da Vinci Code.

The noted American historian Michael Beschloss has said he worries film makers are the historians of this age, and that moviegoers have come to perceive commercial films as actual history. When the author of a phenomenally successful book and movie like The Da Vinci Code says that he actually believes the heresies he has written — as The Da Vinci author Dan Brown has said — Beschloss has reason to be concerned.

We should be, too.

While reading The Da Vinci Code, I remember thinking, "It's going to be difficult turning this into a film script."

The narrative contains much expositional pontificating and puzzle-wrestling, with car chases and brutal killings thrown in simply to separate chapters — but too much exposition is not good for movies.

First-year filmmakers learn that a picture is worth a thousand words. In an effort to stay true to the novel, however, screenwriter Akiva Goldsman (Constantine, Cinderella Man), has given unsuspecting moviegoers a glorified audio book.

Ironically, with all that verbiage, much of the plot is confusing while the pulp theories concerning Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the Priory of Sion come across as ludicrous — even if you aren't a religious historian.

Despite its simplistic literary style, which contains conspiratorial themes intended to rock the Christian faith, The Da Vinci Code has become something of a cultural phenomenon. In it, fictional secrets are revealed claiming Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had a child in that union, and a clandestine society once headed by Leonardo Da Vinci has protected this information for centuries against a threatened Catholic hierarchy.

GUEST OPINION:



Movie heretical, but also just plain bad

By Phil Boatwright
Kansas City, Ka.

The production values are standard, but nothing memorable. The same can be said for Tom Hanks' performance. Here he furrows his forehead during his first scene and never once relaxes it — and poor Audrey Tautou (Amelie), a proven talent, mysteriously lacks charm and manifests barely the slightest chemistry with her co-star.

As for the suspense drama/murder thriller aspects, most successful films in those genres (The Big Sleep, The Third Man) are fun for the audience. The Da Vinci Code isn't. It's murky and joyless, containing a storytelling skill reminiscent of Jacqueline Susann's Valley of the Dolls.

This is a movie that will top box office charts by inheritance alone. Indeed, I suspect the production got a green light for one reason: because its printed parent has refused to wander far from bestselling lists. As a

film, it is compiled of cheesy prose, implausible situations, one-dimensional characters and the absence of even one well-turned phrase. One can only assume that it found its way to the cinema screen because some thought it might smear Christianity, while others just thought, "Ca-ching!"

There are now countless books written by theologians and renowned historians that suck the air out of Dan Brown's diabolical suggestions. Sadly, some people will still be misled and confused by his sleight-of-hand blend of fact and fiction. Many pay more attention to movie stars who play history professors than to actual history.

Billy Graham reported in his syndicated newspaper column, "I know of no reputable Bible scholar or historian (Christian or non-Christian) who would agree with its claims about Jesus or take it

seriously. There simply is no historical evidence to support its alleged 'discoveries' about Jesus: nor is there any evidence at all that Christians have 'covered up' the truth about Jesus." Graham added, "In the last days before Christ's return, according to Paul, people 'will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths'" (2 Timothy 4:4).

Here's hoping the film will give Christians an opportunity to answer questions from those more familiar with the writings of Dan Brown than those of Peter, Paul, and the Apostles.

"The Da Vinci Code" is rated PG-13 — six obscenities, two expletives, three profanities; a nasty albino kills several people by gun, rock bludgeoning, poisoning, and neck-twisting; he also flagellates himself and self-mutilates; scenes of Crusades' battles, witch burnings, and tortures; a sudden in-your-face car crash; blood with most of these killings; the first dead body lays stretched out nude, with a bright light hiding his midsection; we see the albino nude from behind before he starts whipping his already scarred back; brief drug references, a drug addict about to inject himself.)

Boatwright reviews movies from a Christian perspective. For more of his reviews, visit www.pre-viewonline.org. His commentary appears courtesy of Baptist Press.

Presidential race heating up across SBC

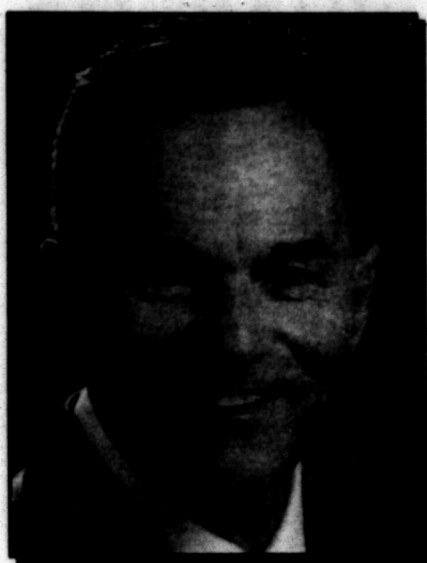
NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP and local reports) — Intrigue abounds over the upcoming election of officers of the Southern Baptist Convention, with the Cooperative Program emerging as a major factor.

Two nominees for SBC president have been announced — Arkansas pastor Ronnie Floyd and South Carolina pastor Frank Page — but one potential nominee, Oklahoma pastor Wade Burleson, has stated that he will vote for another pastor if that pastor, whom Burleson did not name, agrees to be nominated.

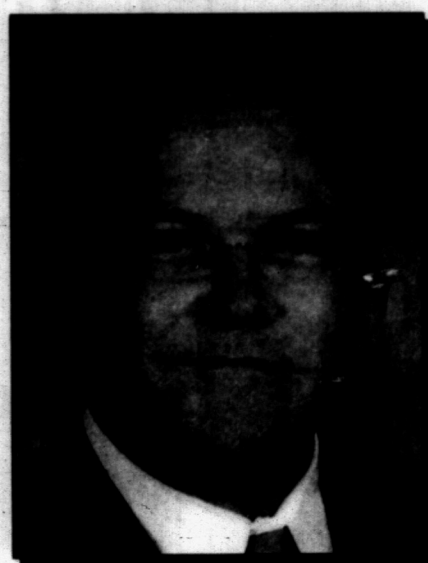
The new president, who will be elected during the SBC annual meeting on June 13-14 in Greensboro, N.C., will replace two-term president Bobby Welch, pastor of First Church in Daytona Beach, Fla.

A special SBC committee studying the future of the Cooperative Program recently recommended that SBC officers should come from churches that contribute at least 10% of undesignated receipts to the Cooperative Program. Some convention officials and observers of the Cooperative Program have expressed concerns that cooperative giving appears to be headed into decline across the SBC.

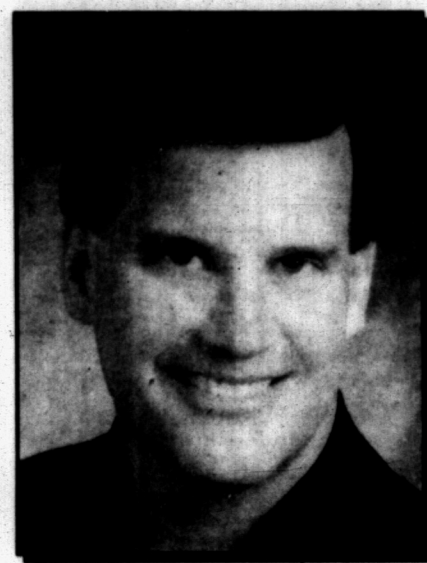
According to the Annual Church Profiles submitted to the SBC by the candidates' churches, Floyd's First Church in Springdale, Ar., contributed .27% to the Cooperative Program last year, while Page's First Church in Taylor, S.C., contributed more than



Floyd



Page



Burleson

12.4% to the Cooperative Program last year.

Disagreements flared when Floyd was publicly endorsed by Southwestern Seminary President Paige Patterson. Patterson's action prompted a word of caution from the SBC Executive Committee's president, Morris H. Chapman, about SBC entity heads endorsing political candidates within the SBC.

An SBC entity head who engages in SBC elections by endorsing or nominating an individual "potentially alienates some who otherwise hold him [the entity head] in high esteem because they differ with the person he has embraced publicly for an elected office," Chapman wrote. "Consequently, the entity head endangers his potential to provide effective counsel and spir-

itual leadership to the larger body of Southern Baptists although their beliefs may coincide with the entity head on most other issues."

Southern Seminary President Al Mohler and Southeastern Seminary President Danny Akin

endorsed Floyd just days after Chapman's statement was released. Akin has also announced that he will nominate a candidate for second vice-president at the Greensboro meeting.

On his Internet site May 11 Burleson, pastor of Emmanuel Church in Enid, Ok., stated he had "received at least twenty five requests from individuals desiring to either nominate me for President of the SBC or allow my name to be nominated by others. I have refrained from commenting when reporters ask my intentions, because I have sought out others to run for President, not myself. I have personally asked five men to run for President of the SBC. For various reasons these men did not feel led of

God to agree to be nominated at this time."

Speculation about Burleson for SBC president was fueled April 20 when Burleson withdrew as a speaker for the Younger Leaders Summit II slated June 12 in Greensboro.

Burleson was in the news most recently when International Mission Board trustees rescinded their action to remove him from the board over issues involving "broken trust" and "resistance to accountability," but trustee officers quickly backed down in the face of mounting public criticism.

The trustee officers were upset that Burleson was using his Internet blog to comment on the actions of the trustee body.



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THE SECOND
FRONT PAGE

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Record

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American Baptists split

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — Following the approval of a large majority of its churches, the board of the American Baptist Churches Pacific Southwest region voted unanimously May 11 to withdraw from its covenant relationship with its parent denomination. The board's action makes final the separation of the 300-church region from the American Baptist Churches (USA) in Valley Forge, Pa. The decision comes after eight months of discussion and a vote on the part of the region's churches in late April to recommend that the board withdraw over the refusal of the ABC (USA) to deal with the acceptance of churches with lax policies on homosexuality in the denomination. Theological differences between the Pacific Southwest region and the national denomination have made "close cooperation" between the two difficult for many years, according to the statement from the board. Many of the denomination's self-governing regions, such as the Evergreen Association in Washington and the Rochester-Genesee region in New York, openly accept churches disassociated from other regions because they accept unrepentant homosexuals as members. The denomination's general board has refused to discipline the regions that accept such churches, citing Baptist freedom and local church autonomy as reasons. The Pacific Southwest region may not be the last region to break with the 1.5-million member parent denomination. American Baptists in West Virginia narrowly rejected a proposal to withdraw from the ABC (USA) at their meeting last year. The Indiana-Kentucky region has also proposed a change in the denomination's bylaws that will not allow churches to transfer to another region when removed over the issue of homosexuality.

Looking back

10 years ago

The 1996 annual meeting of the Mississippi Baptist Convention at First Church, Jackson, has been shortened from five sessions to four sessions at the plea of the messengers, according to Ken Anderson, order of business committee chairman.

20 years ago

First Church, Meridian, celebrates the ministries of three church staffers who have each served the church for at least 25 years: Pastor Beverly Tinnin, Minister of Education David McCubbin, and Minister of Music/Senior Adults John McLaughlin.

60 years ago

Oxford native Roland Q. Leavell, superintendent of evangelism for the Home Mission Board, accepts the presidency of New Orleans Seminary after Duke McCall resigns to become head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.



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1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

ONE MISSING PENNY

Recently, we dedicated the Memorial to the Missing in order to focus the nation's attention on the number of children who are no longer among us since the 1973 Supreme Court decision *Roe vs. Wade*. Every penny in the receptacle represents one child who lost the right to life and in turn the right to be a blessing. This year our nation will unceremoniously, ungloriously, and for many people unknowingly pass the 50 million mark of children who are missing because of abortion. In order to demonstrate and visualize what 50 million looks like, we are still gathering pennies from folks all across the state in order to fill the receptacle.

The parable I want to share with you is not about a missing child but rather about one who is not missing. This is a real story about real people, a real baby, and the real joys that continue to unfold because people cared enough and a mother loved enough to make the difficult decision to carry her child and then share that life through adoption.

Just after the dedication service on Mother's Day weekend, I ran into a longtime friend who told me that she had seen the memorial and looked at all of



Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

the pennies (at that time only about 10 million). As she commented on what an incredible sight it was, she paused, started to cry, and said, "You know that one of those pennies could have been our grandson." Immediately, almost two decades flashed before my eyes and I remembered a couple who lovingly and deeply desired a child and were probing the possibilities. They finally looked to a Christian adoption agency to help them find a baby. As those things usually do, it took time, effort, preparation, and prayer. Finally, one day a precious baby boy came to this wonderful young couple, but he did not enter their world just to be cared for by a mom and dad. Four happy grandparents have shared in the loving, caring, nurturing, guiding, developing, and achieving of this boy. Now he is approaching young man-

hood, and the family is no less ecstatic about him then they were at the very beginning.

The grandmother said to me, "So many, many times we have thanked God for the birth mother who cared enough to go through all that she did in order that we might be blessed by his life." Then lovingly she cried some more. I know the meaning of those tears. For all the pennies that have been given — now over 20 million — what a blessing it is to think about one penny that is not there.

About that time the grandfather walked up and heard the topic of our conversation. He felt had to contribute. A proud, dotting, and often gloating grandfather, he said, "When my grandson was younger he asked me if I thought his birth mother loved him. I replied, 'Oh, my yes she loved you so much. In fact, she loved you so much that she

turned to one of the finest Christian adoption agencies to help her make sure that you would grow up in a wonderful home. Though she was not able to provide everything for you that you would need, she found people who could and would give you the best instruction, care, love, discipline, and spiritual training that you would need for life and everything that she wanted you to have. Oh, yes she loved you!"

As I stood there talking to the two of them and the grandmother continued to cry and the granddad emotionally shared how much he loved this young man, I thought how thankful I am that when we collect the 50 million pennies, one penny will be missing. In fact, this one penny can be found working, singing, smiling, laughing, driving, studying, hugging, eating, dreaming, and learning. He is enjoying life day-by-day, receiving from others, and giving to so many. He is a fine Christian young man who continues to bless all four grandparents, his mom and dad, friends, and last but not least — me! Thank God for one missing penny.

The author may be contacted at P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. E-mail: jfutral@mbcb.org.

Judge foils constitutional marriage amendment

ATLANTA (BP) — In a ruling sure to increase calls for passage of a federal marriage amendment, a Georgia state judge ruled May 16 that the state's constitutional marriage amendment — approved by 76% of voters in 2004 — violates the state constitution.

In tossing out the initiative, Judge Constance Russell ruled that the amendment is unconstitutional because it deals with two subjects, gay marriage and same-sex civil unions. The amendment bans both. The ruling itself did not deal with the legality of gay marriage, but only with a technical legal question as to whether the amendment's language was constitutional.

Homosexual activists filed the lawsuit shortly after voters overwhelmingly adopted the amendment in November 2004, and both sides had been awaiting a decision.

The Georgia constitution prohibits amendments from dealing with more than one subject. Amendment supporters, though, contend that gay marriage and same-sex civil unions comprise the same issue. Legal in Connecticut and Vermont, civil unions grant homosexual couples the legal benefits of marriage without using the word "marriage."

"People who believe marriages between men and women should have a unique and privileged place in our society may also believe that same-sex relationships should have some place although not marriage," Russell wrote, according to the Associated Press. "The single-subject rule protects the right of those people to hold both views and reflect both judgments by their vote."

A similar lawsuit was filed against Louisiana's amendment, although the state's high court ruled that its amendment was OK, even though it also banned both "gay marriage" and civil unions.

The ruling in Georgia is expected to be appealed. "I am very disappointed by this decision to countermand the people of Georgia's voice in defining marriage in our state as a union between a man and a woman," Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, a Republican, said in a statement. "This decision highlights the effect activist judges can have on our system of governance."

"The people of Georgia knew exactly what they were doing when an overwhelming 76% voted in support of this constitutional amendment. It is sad that a single judge has chosen to reverse their decision. I am carefully assessing the

options to ensure that the will of the people will not be thwarted."

The U.S. Senate is scheduled to debate the Marriage Protection Amendment, S.J.Res. 1, in June (see article on page five). Supporters of a federal amendment contend that rulings such as the one in Georgia make a national solution necessary.

Including Georgia, 19 states have passed marriage amendments, and at least seven more states are expected to vote on them this year. The amendments prevent state courts from legalizing gay marriage. An amendment has never lost at the ballot.

Massachusetts' highest court legalized gay marriage, Courts in N.J., New York, and Washington state could follow this year. None have marriage amendments.

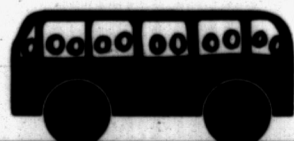
The Georgia marriage amendment states in part: "This state shall recognize as marriage only the union of man and woman. Marriages between persons of the same sex are prohibited in this state. No union between persons of the same sex shall be recognized by this state as entitled to the benefits of marriage."

Mississippi voters overwhelmingly passed a similar constitutional amendment several years ago, and to date it has not been challenged in court.

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2 Timothy 4:7

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ERLC observes June 4 as Marriage Protection Sunday

WASHINGTON (BP) — The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) is asking Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) churches to consider observing Marriage Protection Sunday on June 4, the eve of Senate debate on a constitutional amendment regarding the issue.

Senators are scheduled to begin consideration of the Marriage Protection Amendment (MPA) on June 5, with a floor vote expected June 6 or 7. The MPA — Senate Joint (S.J.) Resolution 1 — defines marriage as only between a man and a woman. The proposal is designed to protect the institution against continuing legal efforts to legalize homosexual marriage.

The ERLC, the Southern Baptist Convention's public policy entity, is requesting pastors to address same-sex marriage on June 4 and to encourage church members to ask their senators to support the amendment.

"Supporters of traditional marriage need to bombard their senators' offices with e-mails and phone calls," ERLC

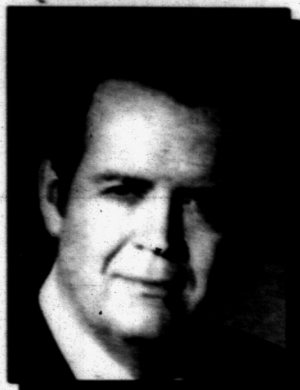
President Richard Land told Baptist Press, "and preachers across America need to let the pulpit ring forth in clear and no uncertain terms on Marriage Protection Sunday, June 4, and help create a groundswell of support for this amendment."

"I can assure you the opponents of traditional marriage are doing their best to let their voices be heard in the corridors of the Senate. It is up to us to let our voices be heard loudly as well."

Massachusetts is the only state to have legalized same-sex marriage, but state supreme courts in New Jersey, New York, and Washington could legitimize such unions before the end of the year.

The Senate Judiciary Committee sent the MPA to the full Senate in a 10-8 vote along party lines May 18, with Republicans in the majority. Two days before the committee's vote, a decision in Georgia seemed to validate calls for a federal amendment. A state judge ruled May 16 that Georgia's marriage amendment, which was approved by 76 percent of voters in 2004, violates the state constitution. The amendment prohibits both same-sex marriage and homosexual civil unions.

The ERLC, which is part of a diverse, pro-amendment coalition, has utilized its Internet site, a collaborative mass mailing and conference phone calls to foster support for the measure.



Land

On its website, ERLC includes suggestions for the activities churches might consider for June 4:

- Information on same-sex marriage could be distributed.
- Pastors might preach on the issue.
- Those in attendance could be encouraged to call or e-mail their senators June 5 or 6 to urge them to vote for the MPA.

The ERLC collaborated with Focus on the Family Action (FOFA) in April to urge Southern Baptist pastors to promote support for the amendment. In an April 12 letter to the 43,600-plus SBC

churches, ERLC's Land and FOFA Chairman James Dobson asked pastors to involve congregations in the attempt to protect marriage. They promoted a postcard campaign as part of that effort.

Postcards are available on the ERLC website for downloading and copying, but the entity says a postcard-signing campaign will be helpful June 4 only if the cards can be hand-delivered to senators' in-state offices the next day. Because of delays caused by the screening process for mail to Congress, it might already be too late to mail cards that would be opened in Senate offices by June 5.

The ERLC conducted conference calls recently with two groups in the SBC in the effort to build backing for the amendment: Ethics workers in state Baptist conventions May 12 and some mega-church pastors May 18.

The gravity of the issue calls for the effort the ERLC is making to mobilize Southern Baptists, said Barrett Duke, the entity's vice president for public policy and research.

"We just don't see anything in American life at this point that has greater implications for our culture than the same-sex marriage issue," Duke told BP. "Just about every area of life will be impacted if same-sex marriage becomes the law of the land."

Ratification of an amendment to the Constitution requires passage by two-thirds



of both houses of Congress and approval by three-fourths of the states. Support in the Senate will have to increase markedly from two years ago to reach the two-thirds majority needed to approve a constitutional amendment. Neither house of Congress came close to a two-thirds majority during votes in 2004.

That year, the Senate failed even to give an up-or-down vote to a similar amendment. Supporters gained only 48 of the 60 votes needed to halt debate and allow a vote, a procedure called invoking cloture. Fifty senators voted against cloture. Also in 2004, the House of Representatives achieved a majority with a 227-186 vote but fell far short of the votes needed for passage.

The ERLC hopes a massive outpouring of support for the amendment by Southern Baptists and others will produce the extra votes, Duke said.

"We certainly don't see any reason why we wouldn't have more votes this time than last time," he said. "The Senate is decidedly more conservative, certainly more Republican, than it was the last time. We believe that if enough senators hear from their constituents, the MPA can be passed. It's obvious that a significant majority of Americans throughout the country do not want same-sex marriage."

"If that significant majority will communicate their convictions to their senators, the amendment should be passed."

Southern Baptists and others may contact senators by calling the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and asking for their offices. E-mails may be sent through a link on the ERLC's website, www.faithandfamily.com, or the Senate's Internet site, www.senate.gov.

The text of the MPA states, "Marriage in the United States shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman. Neither this Constitution, nor the constitution of any State, shall be construed to require that marriage or the legal incidents thereof be conferred upon any union other than the union of a man and a woman."

For more information about the national debate over homosexual marriage, visit <http://www.bpnews.net/same-sexmarriage>.



Dobson



Duke

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JUST FOR THE RECORD



MISSISSIPPI BAPTISTS



1. Deacon Ordination, Shuqualak Church, Shuqualak



2. Bible Drillers and leader, First Church, Greenwood



3. Carr Recognized, East Louisville Church, Louisville



4. RA Race-Off Participants, Central Church, McComb

1. Shuqualak Church, Shuqualak, recently ordained Roy "Bill" Hailey as deacon. Shown are Hailey, pastor Jon Kittrell, and Marcus Anderson.

2. First Church, Greenwood, recognizes its youth Bible drillers: from left, Cassie Cummings, Kristen Vance, and leader Linda Barnette.

3. East Louisville Church, Louisville, recently observed Roberta Carr Day to honor Carr for her many years of service to the church, in Sunday School, WMU, VBS, and intercessory prayer ministry. Carr is 96 years old. Shown are Carr and pastor Keith Dendy.

4. Central Church, McComb, recognizes its RAs who participated in a Race-Off. Front row, from left, Sam Womack, Levi Wishart, and James Breithaupt; center, from left, Ray Roberts, Colby Hipps, Nic Mancuso, Tyler Reed, and Kevin Coon; back row, from left, pastor Tracey Hipps and Billy Madison.

5. Hebron Church, Panola Association, filled a bag with pennies in memory of aborted babies. Hebron has an enrollment of 33 with 95% fixed income members. Shown are some of the congregation.

6. West Heights Church, Pontotoc, recently held a lock-in for the Young Musicians Choir, grades 4-6. Shown are the participants.

7. Cairo Church, Pontotoc, recognizes its Bible drillers. First row, Ale Swords, Andria Anderson; second row, Chris Hamblin, Amber Dillard, John Riefers, and Robbie McGuire; third row, Melinda Matthews, Molly Swords, Lorrie Nance, Lisa Swords, Jim Matthews, and Marie McGuire.

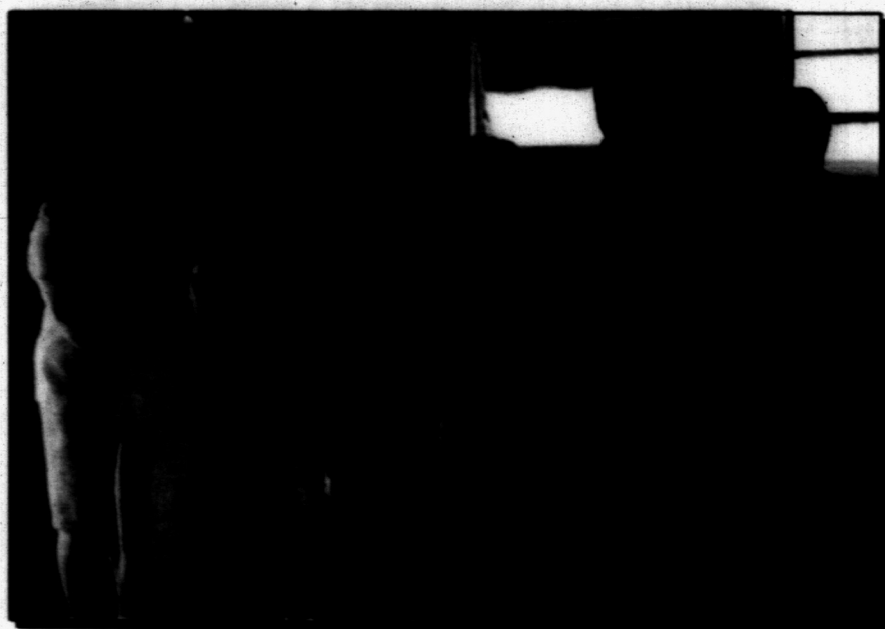
8. GAs from Concord Church, Franklin Association, baked cookies, pies, and cakes on May 13 for a bake sale with the proceeds going to the Baptist Children's Village, raising \$248. Shelia Dillon, GA leader; Bruce Crosby, pastor.



5. Collecting Pennies, Hebron Church, Panola Association



6. Young Musicians Choir, West Heights Church, Pontotoc



7. Bible Drillers, Cairo Church, Pontotoc

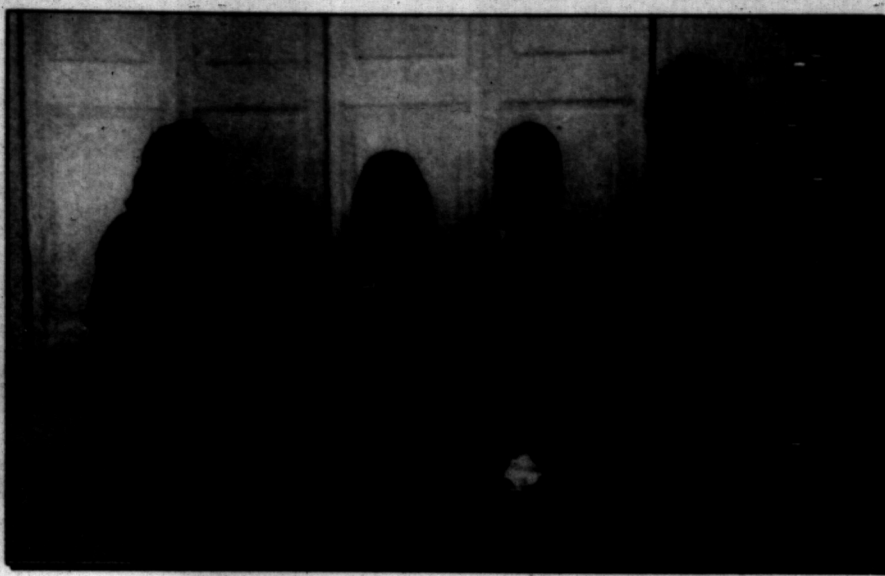


8. GAS, Concord Church, Franklin Association

JUST FOR THE RECORD



10. Penny Collection, First Church, Lexington



11. Bible Drillers, Pine Forest Church, Collinsville



18. Ordination, Paul Church, North Central Association

9. Jonathan Peeples recently announced his call to the gospel ministry and was licensed by Murphy Creek Church, Louisville, Apr. 23. He may be reached for pulpit supply at (662) 773-2096.

10. The children of First Church, Lexington, collected 88 pounds of pennies, or approximately 15,225, for the Memorial to the Missing celebration in Jackson May 13. Shown, front row, are Lake Melton and Zack Thomas; back row, Laura Thomas, Maggie Melton, and Alyssa McLemore.

11. Pine Forest Church, Collinsville, recognizes its children's Bible drillers: Julie Pierce, Brandon Prince, Brook Vance, Jami Roberts, and Robbie Lawson.

12. Calvary Church, Smithdale, recognizes their Bible drillers. From left, Cory Wicker, Sam Wicker, Anna Wicker, and Megan Carney. Leaders were Mary Lynn Wicker and Brenda Wheat.

13. North Carrollton Church, North Carrollton: VBS; kickoff, June 3, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; June 5-9, 8:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.; K4-6th grade; for information, call (662) 453-8204, 237-0047, or 897-9777.

14. Pleasant Hill Church, Columbus: VBS, June 5-9, 8 a.m.-noon.

15. First Church, Madison, is hosting Paid in Full in concert, Thurs. June 1, 7 p.m.

16. LeMoyne Blvd. Church, Biloxi, is hosting a hurricane relief benefit concert featuring Carroll Roberson June 1, 6:30 p.m. (228) 392-3241.

17. The children's ministry of Steep Hollow Church, Poplarville, held their annual Easter celebration Apr. 15 at the home of John and Jennifer Fagan. The



12. Bible Drillers, Calvary Church, Smithdale



MISSISSIPPI
BAPTISTS

children enjoyed great food and fellowship, swimming, and games.

18. Paul Church, North Central Association, recently licensed and ordained their pastor Elbert McKnight to the ministry.

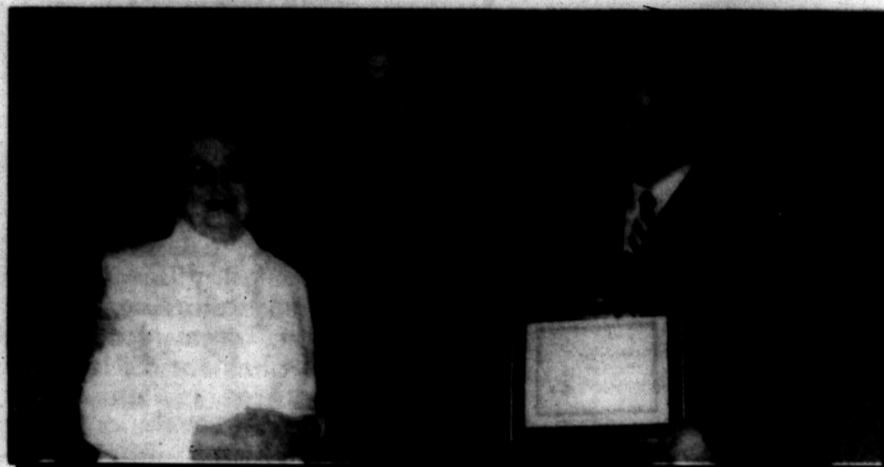
Shown are Eugene Walden, Wayne Gore, McKnight, and Bobby Douglas.

19. First Church, Itta Bena, recently ordained Ben Chapman as deacon. Shown are Billie Chapman, Chapman, and pastor Chris Carter.

20. Pope Church, Pope, recognizes its Bible drillers. First row: Dakota Bolton, Ryan McCurdy, and Tyler Allen; second row: Walt Karr, Maegan Bolton, Haley Beth Allen, and Amelia Bailey; third row: Matt Hendrix and Ashley Roy; and fourth row, Annah Bailey and Brittany Ross.



20. Bible Drillers, Pope Church, Pope



19. Deacon Ordination, First Church, Itta Bena

STAFF CHANGES

Lone Pine Church, Canton, has called Samuel D. Hughes as pastor. He comes from a 12-year pastorate of Calvary Church, Helena, Montana. He is a graduate of Midwestern Seminary and Baylor University.

Terry's Creek Church, Magnolia, has called Todd Sumrall as pastor, effective May 1. He previously pastored First Church, Newellton, La.

Hope Church, Philadelphia, recently called Jacob Glasz and Ashley Perry as ministers of youth. Both are students of Mississippi College.

Students defy federal ruling

RUSSELL SPRINGS, Ky. (BP) — About 200 seniors at a high school graduation in Kentucky stood to recite the Lord's Prayer May 19 in response to a federal judge banning prayer at the ceremony after an ACLU-affiliated lawsuit.

School officials said voluntary prayer had been a part of graduations at Russell County High School in Russell Springs for decades without a complaint until May 16 when an anonymous graduating senior collaborated with the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky to file a lawsuit claiming he was offended by graduation prayers.

"My high school graduation is a very important event for me and I want to attend my graduation without having to compromise my Constitutional rights," the student said in an affidavit. He chose to be identified only as John Doe because he said he feared retaliation.

U.S. District Judge Joseph McKinney granted a temporary restraining order about 12 hours before the start of graduation, ordering school officials and a peer-elected student not to proceed with a scheduled prayer in the ceremony.

During the principal's opening remarks, students stood and said the Lord's Prayer in unison, drawing a standing ovation of support from the crowd of 2,000 people, according to the Associated Press.

The "revival like atmosphere" continued, AP said, when senior Megan Chapman, chosen by her classmates to deliver remarks, mentioned her faith — particularly that she believed God had guided her since childhood. She was interrupted repeatedly by the cheering crowd as she admonished graduates to trust in God.

Christian roots run deep in the Russell Springs community, a local minister told the Lexington Herald-Leader newspaper. With more than 100 churches in the rural county, religion is an issue of great importance, he said.

Bibliocipher

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KJQ LQPK CUV ANJL
DQQKJ AQDOD TNWHLZ
OLKN JHW, ULC DUHKJ,
MQJNSC KJQ SUWM NB
ZNC, GJHTJ KUFQKJ
UGUV KJQ DHL NB KJQ
GNXSC.

ANJL NLQ:KGQLKV-LHLQ

Clue: G = W

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark One:Eleven.

COLLEGE NEWS



1. Phi Theta Kappa Alumni Association Recognized, WCC



3. Nursing students receive grant, WCC

1. William Carey College students were honored at the Centennial Honors Day Convocation held recently on the Hattiesburg campus. Shown, left to right, are Samantha Benson of Taylorsville; Josiah Burns of Pace, Fla.; and Pamela Joy Love of Petal are pictured here following the awards presentation. Tommy King presented the Jenkins-Chastain Citizenship Award to the three students. The highest honor given by the college, it recognizes students who have made the most significant contributions to student and campus life in exemplifying those qualities of citizenship upheld by the college. Burns also received the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, the Joe Roberts Forensics Society Memorial Award, and the Student Leadership Award.

2. Rev. and Mrs. Henry J. Bennett have set up scholarships at New Orleans Seminary and Mississippi College.

The Bennetts have several family members who have attended both institutions. For more information, phone (601) 371-0094.

3. Eighteen William Carey College School of Nursing students received \$9000 in school supplies and gift certificates from a grant distributed by the Nursing2006 Foundation. In response to their needs related to Hurricane Katrina, the students received a combination of Barnes and Nobles gift certificates, stethoscopes and computers. Shown are some of the recipients: (standing left to right) Mary Stewart, Tawanna Martin, Robin Strom, Russell Sanborn, Nadra Patterson, Alena Populis, Cynthia Franklin (seated left to right) Laurel Matthews, Lakesha Meggs, Tia Guillen.

4. Mississippi College has presented the annual 2006 Outstanding Staff Award to Bettye Stewart of Madison. She holds the position of Administrative Assistant to

the President. Bettye Stewart has served in the MC President's office since 1984 in the position of Administrative Assistant to the President. She has served in this capacity to three presidents and an acting president at Mississippi College.



Stewart

5. The Bobby Halford Summer Baseball Camps will be held during the month of June on the William Carey College campus in Hattiesburg. Youngsters ages 7-12 may choose to attend a camp June 5-9 or June 19-23. The camp for ages 13-17 will be conducted June 12-16. All camps will be held from 9:00-3:00 p.m. each day. The cost is \$130 and includes noon meals and camp T-shirt. Applications may be obtained by calling the baseball office at (601) 318-6110 or the external relations office at (601) 318-6192, or by email bhalford@wmcarey.edu.

NOBTS holds post-Katrina commencement

NEW ORLEANS (BP) — It would be difficult to overstate the importance of New Orleans Seminary's 88th commencement exercise May 13. The ceremony not only marked the first graduation on the main campus since Hurricane Katrina, it served as a joyous testimony of God's grace and provision.

"Hearing the stories of what God has done to see everybody through is just a reminder that there isn't a circumstance in which God cannot work," NOBTS President Chuck Kelley said following the service. "There is no heartbreak so great that God cannot mend and heal and we're celebrating that mending and healing today."

Once again the campus teemed with activity as graduates and their families packed Leavell Chapel. The pain and hardship of the past nine months was softened with joy and thankfulness.

A total of 241 certificates and degrees were awarded to the group of graduates who will always be known as "the Katrina class." Many in this group were forced to evacuate just days before the hurricane hit last Aug. 29. Most have moved more than once since the storm.

These students were forced to learn in new ways even as they struggled to recover from deep personal losses. In the aftermath of the worst natural disaster in U.S. history, members of the Katrina class finished their ministry education though scattered throughout the country.

During his charge to the Katrina class, Kelley wore a casual shirt instead of his academic regalia. The shirt was one of only a few

shirts Kelley packed when he evacuated before the hurricane, a small reminder of the challenging 2005-06 school year.

"I want all of us to remember that we have been through a time of unspeakable tragedy," Kelley said. "But when I think about what we ought to take away from this experience; there is one thing I hope all of us have discovered anew and afresh — that God is intentional."

God always tests those who are preparing for ministry with life events, Kelley said. The goal of this testing, he said, is to find out if His followers believe what they know about God.

Kelley related the story of Paul and Silas' experience in the Philippian jail recorded in Acts 16. Despite the fact that they were severely beaten, chained and thrown in prison, Paul and Silas continued praising God. Songs and prayers rose from their dark cell.

"They believed what they knew about God," Kelley said. "They knew that He is a redeemer — He has the power to take any circumstance and transform it for His glory and the good of His children."

As Paul and Silas sang, an earthquake shook the jail. The doors flew open and the chains fell from the prisoners. The jailer was about to take his own life, but Paul and Silas stopped him.

"Through the experience they were able to share the Gospel and the jailer, along with his family, accepted Jesus."

"They believed what they knew about God," Kelley said.

Students in the graduating class earned degrees from 31 different programs.

REVIVALS & HOMECOMINGS

Calvary, Pricedale: Homecoming, June 4; fellowship, 9:30 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m., followed by lunch and afternoon song and praise service; Dan West, speaker; Easthaven Five, music; Ron West, pastor.

County Line Church, Doss-ville: Revival, June 4-7; Sun., 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; lunch, noon; Billy Henry, speaker; Tom and Linda Thompson, music; James Burrell, pastor.

Arlington Church, Bogue Chitto: Homecoming, May 28; lunch, noon; service, 1:30 p.m., Pat Lofton, speaker. Doug Moak, music; Keith Smith, pastor.

Friendship, Brookhaven: Homecoming, May 28; Sunday School, 10 a.m.; worship, 11 a.m., followed by lunch and afternoon service; Gordon Coker, speaker.

Georgetown Church, Copiah Assoc.: Revival, June 4-7; Sun., 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Ronald Meeks, speaker; Trent Nethery, pastor.

Hebron Church, Pheba: Memorial Day, June 14, 11 a.m., followed by dinner and singing; James Parker, speaker; Ray Spence, pastor.

Ingomar Church, New Albany: 100th Anniversary, June 2-4; Fri.-Sat., 6 p.m.; Sun., 9:30 a.m.; preaching and testimonies by former pastors, special music, recognition of older church members, video presentation, and more. Call (662) 534-4577.

Shiloh Church, Big Creek: Homecoming, June 4; services, 10:30 a.m., followed by singing and dinner on the ground; Billy Wells, speaker; Johnny Hearn, pastor.

Shiloh Church, Carroll County: Homecoming, May 28, 11 a.m., followed by lunch; Doug Warren, pastor and speaker.

Tishomingo Chapel, Alcorn Co.: Homecoming Heritage Day, June 4; singing, 10 a.m.; worship, 11 a.m., followed by fellowship meal; Carrol Talley, speaker; Heartland Bluegrass Gospel Group, music.



Practical Principles for Christian Living

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The pulpit and politics: time to come out of our shell



Porter

By Jimmy Porter

Frances Schaeffer asks, "If not you, who? If not now, when? And if not this, what?" These

remarks were usually made to motivate Christians to get involved with the world.

As a pulpit guest, I had completed a sermon on the family in which I encouraged the congregation to vote for and support the Mississippi Marriage Amendment. After the sermon a lady approached me and said, "Thank you for that word, Brother Jimmy. We know all these things, but we are not going to do much until our pastor tells us to."

Her comments were not 100% accurate, but there is enough truth in them to cause us to stop and consider the importance of the pulpit and the influence of the church in our world. In a recent article, *Coming of Age in the 70's*, (Faith & Family Values, March-

April 2006), Richard Land sheds some light on the prolonged silence of the church through most of the 20th century.

Land alludes to a couple of articles by George Weigel, who discusses the return of conservative Evangelicals from the cultural hinterlands to which they were consigned in the aftermath of the Scopes Trial of 1925. Weigel asserts that Evangelicals were content to remain in their enclaves, worshipping and educating their children as they saw fit, asking only to be left alone by the larger society.

The opinion was that it seemed best for Christians to stay behind this often self-imposed wall that separated one's religious convictions from the affairs of the state. It was not until the Supreme Court Decision, *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973 that most people realized the church and the pulpit could no longer remain silent. Many conservative Evangelicals began to get involved in the process to implement cultural change by speaking out on social issues from their pulpits and places of work.

Having grown up as a young pastor in the 60's and 70's, I can now look back and see that this "wall of separation" was real. The sad part is that in some ways it has never gone away. Have you ever heard statements like this: "Preacher, preach the Bible and leave politics alone;" or "Pastor, you are meddling in community affairs and you are going to make someone mad;" or "Preacher, get 'em saved, and the rest will take care of itself."

All this presents a dilemma for the pastor. Should the church remain silent on abortion, substance abuse, pornography, domestic abuse, gambling, race, and other issues, or should God's word be applied and Christian conduct be taught and expected?

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for prophet is used more than 300 times. Even though the etymology of the word is unclear, the general consensus is that prophet is related to Akkadian and Arabic words meaning "to call" and to "announce." Thus,

taken in an active sense a prophet was an "announcer" or "proclaimer of the purpose and activity of God."

In the New Testament, John the Baptist and Jesus were both perceived to be prophets by their contemporaries, which ignited an interest in their ministries. The Apostle Paul often highlighted the importance of the gift of prophecy, "the intelligible preaching that builds upon the church in faith" (The Interpretative Dictionary of the Bible).

Woven throughout the Scriptures are the stories of men and women who confronted the issues of their day. It was not easy. In fact, Isaiah 30:10 says, "Who says to the seers, 'Do not see,' and to the prophets, 'Do not prophesy to us right things; Speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits' (NKJV)." A modern translation to this verse is "Preacher, if this is going to ruffle a few feathers and make someone mad or offend someone — don't preach it."

The role and responsibility of preaching is not for the weak or for those who desire comfort. I have often wondered how Nathan felt as he sat before David and announced that the king was the scoundrel who took Bathsheba for his wife and had her husband killed. Sometimes the message that comes from God speaks loud and clear to cultural issues. It challenges and convicts. Sometimes it will cost you, but ultimately it is the Word that stands. Often the truth is not "smooth," but still must be spoken. If we don't say it, who will?

In my years of ministry one thing has become crystal clear. The world is not going to change without a clear concise call that comes from the pulpit and the pews of our churches. We must move from behind the wall that separates our religious convictions from our worldly conversations.

Porter is executive director-treasurer of the Christian Action Commission. He can be reached at jporter@christianaction.com.

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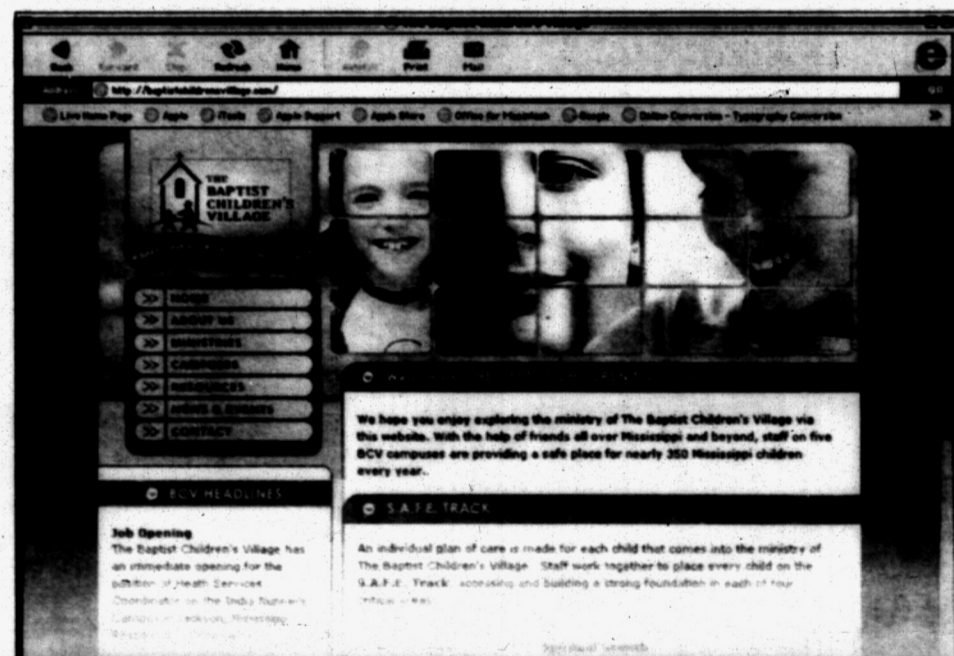
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Support for 2006 High School Seniors

The Baptist Children's Village has four high school seniors graduating this month. Some will go away to college/technical school; others will continue to live on the respective campuses and commute to school, but all are continuing their education. They all have a list of special needs to help them make this transition.

You can make a donation designated for our seniors or contact Mrs. Chrystelle Thames at 601-922-2242 or cthames@baptistchildrensvillage.com for specific items off of their needs list. All donations should be sent to:

The Baptist Children's Village
PO Box 27 • Clinton MS 39060-0027



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FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Mary: Unwavering Focus

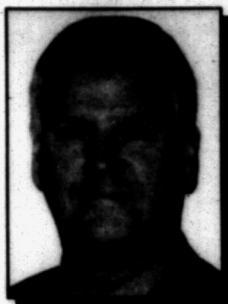
Luke 10:38-42, John 12:1-8

By Huey Dedmon

Several years ago my wife and I owned a Nikon 35mm camera. We loved the camera because it took wonderful pictures of our children. Capturing memories on film is a daily part of the lives of most families. There was one thing about the camera that we had trouble with: it had a manual focus. While the majority of our pictures turned out beautifully, there was that occasional out-of-focus picture. Life is a lot like our experiences with our camera. For the most part we see things pretty clearly, but every once in a while we lose our focus. Life has a way of causing us to lose track of what is really important. Many believers find themselves struggling to "keep

the main thing the main thing."

Our lesson this week is about Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Mary demonstrates for us a model for keeping her focus on what was the right choice for her. While traveling toward Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples came into a village and were invited into the home of Martha, Mary's sister (Luke 10:38-39). Martha became very busy trying to get everything in order for her guests. Mary sat down at the feet of Jesus and began to listen to his conversation (v. 39-40). Martha became even more distracted because she was doing all the work and Mary was just sitting there. She asked Jesus to tell Mary to get up and help her (v. 40). Jesus responded to



Dedmon

Martha that Mary had made the right choice and it would not be taken away from her (v. 42). If we are not careful we will miss the whole point of this passage. Mary's choice was to focus on Jesus. Martha was distracted by all the things she thought she had to do and

missed out on an opportunity of a lifetime. She could have sat with the Lord and learned from Him. What are we distracted by? How many opportunities have we missed by focusing on what we think is important, when we should be keeping our eyes on Jesus? I know we have responsibilities and we have to take care of them, but too often our balance is off. We spend too little time with Jesus and too much time on other things.

In the book of John we catch another glimpse of this story and learn even more about Mary's unwavering focus. While sitting at the feet of Jesus, Mary took a pound of very fragrant, expen-

sive oil, and poured it on Jesus' feet. She then wiped His feet with her hair (John 12:3). The significance of this act to Mary was very high. The oil represented about a year's worth of earnings for the common worker of that day, but to Mary, I believe, it represented her deep love for her Lord. We already know that Mary's brother Lazarus was sitting at the table with Jesus (v. 2). Can you imagine this scene? Earlier in His travels, Jesus had raised her brother from the dead. Lazarus was already in the tomb and normally his body would have already started to decay. Jesus called him out of the grave and now here they were sitting together. Mary's oil was a very small offering to the one she adored with her very life. She gave the very best she had to Jesus. What are we giving to Jesus? We put the very best in our homes, but we will settle for much less in the church. We will devote the bulk of our free time to leisure and fun, and Jesus gets what is left, if there is any. Give Jesus your best!

Our focus on Jesus often becomes blurred because we depend more on the approval of others than we do on Jesus' approval. It is obvious in verse three that Mary was not worried about what the others sitting at the table thought of her actions. She could have easily become distracted by the criticism she received from Judas. Others there may have been criticizing her for touching Jesus' feet. This was a real taboo in Jewish custom. Whatever was going on around Mary, her focus remained on Jesus. While there is no recorded response of Mary's reaction to the criticisms, we do have Jesus' reaction. Jesus told them to leave her alone (v. 7). Jesus approved of what she was doing because He knew this act was in preparation for His death and resurrection (v. 7-8).

Whose approval do we seek? The only opinion that really matters is that of Jesus Christ.

Dedmon is minister of education at First Church, Grenada.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Praise Our Incomparable God

Micah 7:8-20

By Lori Clendinning

You may or may not have heard or read the story behind the song, *The Heart of Worship*, that was written by Matt Redman of Watford, England. In the late 1990s Redman's pastor was convicted that his church's worship service had become more performance oriented for people's praise and less directed toward true worship of God. Thus, he boldly and bravely eliminated all forms of music from his church's worship services. No praise songs, no hymns. No preludes or postludes. Not a note to be sung or played during the invitation nor during the offertory. No special music, no cantatas. Soloists, ensembles, choirs, etc., were silenced. The musical fast lasted through a season of much prayer

and soul-searching. One result of this experience was Redman's penning these words: "When the music fades, all is stripped away and I simply come, longing just to bring something that's of worth, that will bless Your heart. I'll bring you more than a song, for a song in itself is not what You have required. You search much deeper within, through the way things appear. You're looking into my heart."

God looks deeply and intently into the heart of everyone, believers and non-believers alike. He knows the content and the intent of our thoughts and actions. There is nothing hidden from Him for He alone sees all and knows all.

Yet many adults, including believers who regularly worship God, neglect the element of praise in their worship.



Clendinning

Although they may sing praise songs or hymns in worship services, such adults may not sing those words wholeheartedly. Prayer may be part of their daily regimen, but praising God during those prayers may be absent, too. What does God want from

His children? We must recognize His unique and incomparable nature and to praise Him for who He is and for what He does.

This week's lesson in Micah helps point us toward praising God regardless of our circumstances because He is worthy. As a prophet of Judah, Micah lived about 750-700 B.C. in Moreshethgath, a village southwest of Jerusalem. There are at least three other Micahs in Bible history, one living in 12th century B.C. who stole 1100 pieces of silver from his mother (Judges 17-18), another in 10th century B.C. who was a descendant of Uzziel and who ministered in the Tabernacle during King David's reign (1 Chr. 23-25), and the third was a leader of the tribe of Reuben (1 Chr. 5).

However, the prophet Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah, coming from a rural background which enabled him to use pastoral imagery as he ministered to God's people. Micah believed that true faith came from the heart and not from formal sacrifices. He spoke of a future Messianic kingdom where Israel's remnant would be gathered together to live in peace. He wanted God's people to trust Him to demonstrate His faithfulness to the covenant by delivering them from the future exile in Babylon that would result from their sins and by bringing them back to the Promised Land. Likewise, we can praise God for His incomparable deliverance of us from sin.

Micah looked forward to the day when Jerusalem would be rebuilt, the people would return from exile, and people of all nations would come to Jerusalem. God promised that His people would have an incomparable destiny with Him. Similarly, we have a promise given to us as believers in Jesus Christ's return.

In Micah 7:14-17, God promised His people that He would again bless them by doing the same kind of wonderful deeds He had done in the past. His incomparable deeds would lead people from other nations to worship Him: "They will turn in fear to the Lord our God." Likewise, we know that "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Philippians 2:11)

God's incomparable devotion to His people is evident in His forgiving love (Micah 7:18), redeeming power (v. 19), and continuous faithfulness (v. 20). For all that He is and does, we, like the people of Micah's day, can praise God for His great devotion and His unfailing commitment.

Whether there is music in the church house or not, we all have reason to sing. God is great and God is good. He has saved us, to raise us up on that glorious day. Knowing this, every believer can come to the heart of worship and write our own praise song.

Clendinning is a member of First Church, Brandon.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts

are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

All news items are subject to editing,

and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. Requests to return photographs must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

THE BAPTIST
Record

Memories of the Missing

A statue for Grant and Robert E. Lee
For the soldiers who keep us free
The lady in the harbor the world comes to see
Our Statue of Liberty!
We should remember all we revere
The 50 million babies who are not here.

Fifty million pennies in a glass case
Memories for the missing, this is their face
Fifty million pennies no one should cheer
For 50 million babies who are not here.

Monuments for battles and victories won
Journeys, marches, but we're still missing one
One for the little ones who are so dear
The little ones who are not here
Statues of marble, of granite or stone
Each one is precious and for someone gone

Fifty million pennies in a glass case
Memories for the missing, this is their face
Fifty million pennies no one should cheer
For 50 million babies who are not here
50 million children who should be here.

MEMORIAL

May 13, 2006

To the Missing

Photos by William H. Perkins Jr.